

A Pretty Damn Good Babysitter by IncompleteSentanc (Erava)

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Summary:

Steve ends up in Barb's place in the Upside Down, and grows up a lot faster than he would have. Between dodging Demogorgons and vines that had far too much sentience, and trying to buy time for Will to use his magic and his mothers insanity to get them the hell out of there, he comes to a realization much quicker than he otherwise would have.

Steve Harrington might be an idiot, but it turns out he's a pretty damn good babysitter.

A Pretty Damn Good Babysitter

Author's Note:

For my followers, I'm back into the game again, and I'll see you in the usual fandoms later. :>

“Wait.” Nancy interrupts him suddenly, quiet and uncomfortable. Steve immediately pulls back to look at her, frowning in concern.

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s... It’s Barb. Can you...” Nancy chews her lip for a moment, rubbing her bared arms, and Steve rubs her shoulders with his thumbs.

“Hey, what are you worried about? I’m sure she’ll get home safe.” Steve takes a wild guess, and it seems to be accurate from the hopeful glance Nancy shoots him.

“Could you just... Could you just make sure she got out of the house alright?”

A tiny bit of frustration tugs at him. He’d finally gotten Nancy comfortable enough for this, and now he was being interrupted.

Still, she looks so hesitant and uncertain that he just sighs, giving her a quick kiss and a reassuring squeeze of her shoulders. “No problem, Nance. I’ll be right back.” He promises, and her relieved and grateful smile is worth the inconvenience. He pulls away and steps out of the room, giving her a quick wink before shutting the door behind him.

He quickly glances through the upstairs - hearing a disturbing noise coming from, even more disturbing to think about, his *mom's room* - before heading downstairs.

He doesn't immediately see Barb, only spotting her when he passes the sliding back door. She's striding away from the pool, and by the time he's stepped out after her, she's already disappearing around his house. He watches her go for a second, not sure if he's supposed to go after her or just take this as confirmation that she's leaving, then holds his hands up and sighs.

Steve turns around, looking out at the pool for a moment. The unopened beer can (and the tool Barb had failed in using to open it) lie a few feet away from him. He crouches down, grabbing the tool and frowning at the blood on it before he picks up the beer can. He opens it almost absently, cracking the tab and knocking it back.

Blood drips unnoticed from the edge of the sharp tool.

He's halfway through the can when rustling has him twisting sideways, just in time to see something honestly straight out of his worst nightmare.

He doesn't have the chance to scream.

The half drunk beer can clatters to the ground and rolls away, leaving a stream of beer behind as it goes.

The few drops of blood on the pavement are easily washed away by the liquid.

He wakes up on his back and shivering with the cold. He blinks his eyes open, momentarily confused as to why he's hallucinating, and after a couple seconds, realizes.

He isn't.

Steve props up onto one elbow, frowning in utter confusion. It's dark - not pitch black, but dark enough that it's like there's only the moon to light the world anymore. He's... in his pool, except black vines and- oh, *ew*.

Some sort of squishy, *fleshy material*, covers the inside of his pool. There's no sign of the water, and there's no sign of the lights that are usually around his pool. Flakes of... *something* float through the air around him, and he's almost afraid to breathe in the air. They look like oversized snowflakes but float both upwards and down, and the air tastes *rancid*.

Like roadkill.

Steve swallows back his nausea, pushing onto his feet, and winces at the dizziness in his head. "Nancy?" He calls automatically, looking around. "Barbara? Hell, Tommy?" He tries.

He turns fully around and freezes.

There's a monster behind him, slowly rising to it's feet and making low, gurgling growling sounds.

There's... a monster.

In his pool.

Which is covered in flesh and vines.

"What the *FUCK?!*" Steve screams, already turning and bolting. The monster roars behind him and he flings himself where his pool ladder is supposed to be, and praises Jesus when he finds the metal bars under the flesh that he's trying really hard not to think about. He's up and out in seconds, the monster's clawed fingers scratching into his leg at the last second, and he staggers as the monster screams it's displeasure.

He doesn't turn around. He bolts into the house, racing up the stairs. It's cold in here, too, which makes no sense, because he was *just here*. "Nancy?!" He yells urgently, throwing open his bedroom door, and

pants out a harsh, confused breath.

There's no sign of her.

Steve? He thinks he hears her voice faintly, *very faintly*, and recoils in even more confusion. Where the hell-

He turns. The monster is clambering up the stairs. *Fuck*, Steve thinks, panicking, and without a second thought, he throws himself right over the railing of his staircase. He sails straight past the monster, hitting the ground hard - and making his leg *scream* in pain - but shoves to his feet and *bolts*.

This time, he doesn't hesitate.

He just *runs*.

His leg doesn't look good. Steve tucks himself into a crevice against a particularly large tree and examines it, and grimaces deeply. His heart is *pounding* in his chest, his eyes are darting wildly around, and he's so far beyond on edge that he's amazed his heart hasn't just given out.

There are three gashes from his calf down to the side of his foot, particularly deep over the curve of his ankle bone.

It fucking hurts.

Steve leans his head back, trying to just *breathe*. He's not sure how long he ran, but he's *seriously* glad he's not just fast but does a lot of cardio.

He's in a forest. It's dark and gloomy, there's a faint reddish tint to the sky overhead, and everything is a dark, murky blue or black. The wildlife is black, *all* of it, with vines writhing along the ground. He's

been caught by them a couple times, but learned quickly to leap over the fucking things. Which is not easy because they move and actively lash out to grab at him.

Luckily, they aren't moving right now, giving him a tiny respite.

He just got kidnapped by an alien.

He's in some mirror dimension.

He's two seconds from becoming completely hysterical.

What the fuck, what the fuck, what the FUCK? Steve thinks, gripping his hair so tight it hurts. His head is still spinning from the alcohol, which doesn't make this any easier. But he's in a mirror *fucking* dimension, being hunted by a goddamn alien monster thing with no face and a *fuckton* of teeth.

He can't catch his breath. It's not working, and the dead silence of the unmoving dimension just makes every breath more anxious than the last. All he can hear is his own breathing, the pounding of his chest, and he's *terrified* that the alien monster can hear them too.

There's a distant crunch and a faint gurgling, growling sound.

"Shit," Steve hisses, springing to his feet as quietly as possible. His leg aches viciously, the muscles protesting, and every time he puts weight on the foot it digs into the edge of the cuts, which hurts like a *bitch*.

It both helps and doesn't that he's barefoot. It helps because being barefoot means making less sound. It doesn't help because either the gnarly ass flesh is squishing nauseatingly under his pads, or he's scratching his feet up on whatever random splotch of non-squishiness he comes across.

The upside to it is that it turns out he runs even faster barefoot than when wearing shoes, even if it's disgusting and sometimes painful.

So he's barefoot, kidnapped, and being hunted throughout a mirror dimension by a fucking alien monster.

Suddenly he aches viciously for Nancy.

Steve doesn't know how much time passes. He's exhausted, getting slightly hungover, and he's *insanely* thirsty from all the beer. There's no water in sight, and even though he lost the alien monster about an hour ago, he can't find a place that looks even remotely safe to sleep in. Especially with the *goddamn vines* over everything.

So he stays awake, resting his body but not his mind, and finally, *finally* gets his heart to stop trying to beat straight out his chest.

He's barefoot, freezing his ass off, trapped in a mirror dimension, being hunted by a *fucking alien monster without a goddamn face*.

This is *not* how he expected junior year to go, and it's really pissing him off.

I was two seconds away from having sex with the girl of my dreams, and I get kidnapped and gnawed on by a fucking monster. Steve thinks, smacking his head back against a black, rotten smelling tree.

He's also pretty sure the air here is poisonous, because after only... however long he's been here, his lungs really fucking ache.

He's pretty sure his leg is looking pretty gnarly, too, but it's hard to tell because there's barely any lighting in the godforsaken place. He can barely make out the three gouges under all the blood, but luckily, the blood is pretty centralized, so he doesn't think he bled *too* much. Plus, it stopped bleeding approximately two hours ago, even though he hadn't stopped moving the damn thing.

The upside is, he seems to have temporarily lost the alien monster *without a fucking face*.

The downside is, no way in hell does he feel safe enough to sleep with nothing but a tree and a leafless bush to hide him from sight.

Fuck, Steve thinks, smacking his head back against the slightly

squishy tree bark. *Fuck, fuck, fuck.*

And then he hears it.

A low grumble and deep sniffing, like it smells something but can't *quite* get a grasp on it.

Great.

Now it's sniffing him out.

At least Steve paid attention enough in class to know where to go when he springs back to his feet and takes off.

If it's tracking him by scent, he needs to lose it in some water.

Except. There. Is. No. Fucking. Water.

Steve's looked *everywhere*. All the creeks, all the streams, all the godforsaken *puddles* of water throughout Hawkins are just... *gone*.

No pools, no baths, no sinks full of water. Hell, he even tried looking in a washing machine for some damp clothing to squeeze water out of.

Which, honestly, spoke to the level of desperation he was rapidly descending into.

He's not sure how long he's been there. He's run his feet to shreds but can barely even feel it under how fucking *cold* he is.

"I hate this place, I hate this place, I hate this place," Steve mutters in a constant mantra as he frantically searches the stores of Hawkins.

But no matter where he looks, no matter how hard he searches, he's forced to come to a painful conclusion.

Somehow, this mirror dimension had all the outward aspects of his actual home.

Somehow, it lacked every single object possible.

No food. No water bottles. No goddamn cans of soda. The wet and dry foods are just *gone* from pantries. There's no cloth, no sheets, no clothes. No curtains. No... *anything* except floors, walls, roofs, and empty shelves within.

The shapes of the houses were there, but *none* of it's belongings existed.

I'm going to die, Steve realizes.

If he had to hazard a very uncertain guess, he'd say he's been here at least a day and a half. With all the running around and non stop exertion he had going on, trying to dodge and alien monster and all, he probably doesn't have much longer before he straight up dies from dehydration.

"This is not," Steve angrily snarls as he furiously kicks the empty, empty, empty shelves of a hardware store, "the way, I thought, junior year, was going to go!" Steve half screams the last part.

He stands there panting for a moment, fists clenched at his sides.

A low, gurgling noise has him hissing a curse.

With his rapidly flagging energy, Steve launches off one of the towering shelves and starts running.

Nancy had known something was wrong.

No one, no *boy*, just vanishes from his own home when there's a half naked girl waiting for him.

She'd waited, and then shame and mortification began to sink in. *He just brought me here to humiliate me. A joke*, she realizes. She shoves on her shirt and races out of the house before Tommy or, even worse, Carol comes out and sees what's going on.

Except Steve's car is still in the driveway, worry kicks back into the forefront again, and after a long minute's hesitation, she goes back inside to wait.

He never shows up.

Two days later, Steve's car vanishes from the driveway and ends up at the airport, and Will Byer's body washes up in the Quarry.

"I saw it." She tells Jonathan quietly but fiercely at the funeral home.

"I *saw it*," she tells him again hours later in the photography room at Hawkin's High. Jonathan looks between the picture and her, guilt eating as his expression.

"I thought my mother was insane." He says quietly.

"We need to find this thing. We need to go into the woods." Nancy says with all the firm confidence she can muster. Her insides quiver and her hands shake, but she's steady when she holds Jonathan's pistol the next morning.

She hadn't dated Steve for long. Only a couple of months, really.

But she could honestly say she was stupidly in love with him.

She fires and the can goes flying.

“Let’s get them back.” Nancy says firmly, gripping the gun.

Jonathan gives a curt nod.

Steve runs into Will by complete accident. He’s running from the monster, *still*, and he’s pretty goddamn desperate when he spots the isolated house. He dives in and slams the door, for all the good that’ll do him, and then takes a second to breathe.

When he looks up, he freezes.

Will Byers stands across the room from him, eyes wide and lips parted.

Steve opens says something, then quickly remembers and puts a finger to his lips. Will, pale faced and looking utterly stunned, nods agreement. They meet halfway across the room, Steve lowering himself a bit. “Where the fuck are we?”

“I have no idea.” Will admits softly, and god, he sounds so young. Steve’s chest aches a bit because if this place is scaring the shit out of *him*, he can’t imagine how bad it is for an innocent little kid.

Will... baby, talk to me. A woman’s voice sobs, far in the distance, and Will’s face crumples.

Steve frowns, looking at him in confusion before remembering where the hell they even are.

The Byers' house.

The woman must be Joyce.

"You can talk to her?" Steve asks slowly and Will nods, gesturing upwards.

Steve looks up and blinks. It had seemed so damned normal that for a second, Steve just stares stupidly, wondering how he'd missed it.

Will's house has things in it. Like a shitton of Christmas lights.

"How...?"

"I'm not sure." Will admits, chewing his lip. "Most places don't have anything, but way out here, stuff starts showing up. Mostly it's just electricity and some junk," Will gestures vaguely, and it's pretty accurate. There are lights everywhere, wooden furniture, and a sofa - but nothing else on the walls, nothing on the floor. Not even a rug or paintings... except a phone, which Steve peers at curiously.

"Don't bother." Will advises before he can take more than one step.

"Why not?" Steve demands, looking over his shoulder.

"Electricity doesn't respond well to us. That's the second phone I blew up trying to contact Mom." Will says, then bites his lip and looks mournfully at the device.

Steve grimaces, swallowing thickly and heading over to join him by the sofa up against the wall. Christmas lights are draped across the wallpaper, and if Steve squints, he can see writing under the vines and flesh coating everything. "What...?" He reaches out and touches one of the lights.

It lights up, so suddenly and unexpectedly that he jerks his hand back in alarm.

"Light." Steve realizes, staring, and Will nods.

"I'm using it to talk to mom."

Will? Are... are you there, baby? Joyce Byer's tearful voice asks.

"I can't make out most of the letters." Steve says, squinting. "I need to let her know I'm alive. My mom's probably worried to death."

Will hesitates for a second.

"What?" Steve asks, frowning.

"They... don't think you're missing. Not like they do me." Will says quietly, looking down at his feet.

Unease tingles through his stomach, and his lips feel even more numb than usual in this cold ass place when he speaks. "What do you mean?"

Had they somehow not noticed him *fucking vanishing*? Didn't his friends care enough to realize? Or at least Nancy?

"I heard Jonathan last night." Will explains, chewing his lip. "He was talking to Nancy." Steve twitches slightly at that. "Nancy convinced him you were missing, because your car... she says it was in the driveway."

"It was. Did... someone move it?" Steve asks slowly, confused.

"...They found it at an airport. The police said you flew to Florida."

It says a lot about Steve's mental state that the first thing he says in response is, "*Florida*? Seriously? I would never go there." He says, disgusted.

"Well they found my body in a quarry, so." Will shrugs, shooting him an irritated look.

Right.

Priorities.

...Wait. "Body? How? Our bodies are here, right? Or is this actually hell and we're already dead?" Steve demands, voice rising.

“We’re not *dead*. Your heart’s beating, idiot.”

Oh, right, yeah. That.

Steve sits down on the floor and takes a few deep breaths, watching Will eyeball the lights on the wall.

“...I don’t suppose you know a place to get water?”

There’s a stream far out in the woods. Well beyond Will’s house, but it’s the only water he’s seen in days, and he doesn’t hesitate to chug it down. It tastes bad, like the poison’s seeped into it, but he drinks it anyways, because he’s been breathing the damn poison for days now.

Days, according to Will. Three of them for him, five for Will.

Steve looks at the kid, who is pale and already too thin, with dark bruises under his eyes and cracked, almost white lips. “You look like hell. Go to sleep. I’ll keep watch.” Steve tells him.

It’s a testament to how tired he is that Will passes the fuck out.

Steve gets what must be his seventh ‘second wind’ by now and stays up the whole time watching the woods intently.

Once Will’s awake, they chug down as much water as they can and head back to his house. Steve passes out on the flesh covered living room floor while Will communicates with the lights and Joyce Byer’s voice echoes distantly in the back of his head.

It’s hours later when they’re found.

“Steve!” Will hisses, and the bubbly, growling sound of the alien

monster has Steve leaping to his feet in an instant. His heart rate skyrockets and he sees the monster's silhouette in the distant window.

"Hide. I'll be back once I lose it." Steve instructs, already rushing for the door.

"Steve, wait!" He tries to protest.

Steve kicks the door open just in time for it to hit the monster, and then he takes off running.

His heart is pounding, he's honestly terrified as the monster thunders after him with an ear splitting screech, but Will is safely left behind, and that makes it worthwhile.

He doesn't know how long he runs. His body *throbs*, his lungs burn with far more than just exertion, and he's afraid to see how much skin he even has *left* on his feet at this point.

But he runs, and he runs, and he runs, until suddenly, the monster screeches and dives away. Steve slows down, watching in incredulous confusion as the monster disappears into the trees.

"...What the hell?" He wonders.

Will, a distant voice whispers, far far in the back of his head.

Steve grimaces, staring at the trees the monster had vanished into. He stands there, honestly lost on what the hell to do now.

After a minute, he turns his head back to the Byers', only to pause a few yards away. Rustling has him diving for the nearest tree, pressing

himself up against it as something stomps and drags across the forest floor.

What the fuck? Steve wonders, utterly bemused. He's been chased by this goddamn alien monster for *days* and all of a sudden he gets randomly sidetracked? What the actual shit?

He peers around the tree and sees nothing.

Cautiously, he moves to the next tree, and then he sees it.

The monster, doubled over and chowing down on some sort of living creature, which makes no sense, because there's *nothing* alive here except the monster, himself, and Will.

What the fuck? Steve leans back against the tree, taking slow, deep breaths.

There's rustling not far away, beyond him and the monster and off to the side. Steve bites his lip.

If there's another goddamn monster, he's done. He quits. He's *not* trying to outrun *two* of the motherfuckers.

Steve takes a deep breath and turns, fists ready.

The back of a woman's head is a few feet away. She's utterly frozen, staring right at the feasting monster.

Steve moves silently, practicing the 'ninja skills' he claimed to Nancy that he had, and seizes her in one quick, silent motion. One hand over her mouth, the other around her waist, and he hauls her straight up, backwards over a crackly bit of undergrowth, and hustles a few trees away. The woman is completely frozen against him, other than the frantic breathing against his hand, and he quickly releases her, spinning her around and pressing her against a tree.

He blinks.

She stares at him, eyes going huge.

"Nancy?" Steve asks softly, stunned, and Nancy's eyes fill with tears.

She wraps her arms around him and sobs into his shoulder, quiet and further muffled by his shirt, and Steve numbly embraces her back.

Nancy's here.

In the mirror dimension.

With the *alien monster there*.

He pushes Nancy back, grabbing her shoulders hard, and leans down to get eye to eye with her. Tears of joy, grief, and terror contort her face. "How'd you get here, Nancy? Tell me."

"There- I- I was hunting it." Nancy explains shakily, her voice so soft he can barely hear it. "Jonathan and I, we're looking for you and Will, and we... we found it dragging a dying deer away. We followed it. I found a... a tree, with, with a hole in it?" Nancy shakes her head, distressed. "It doesn't make sense. I climbed in and came out here. Where... where are we?"

"I have no fucking clue, Nance." Steve says with the utmost honesty. "But you need to get your ass back through that tree, *now*." Steve hisses urgently.

Nancy looks lost and distressed as he tries to pull her away, but he doesn't even know where to guide her to, and since when were portals to mirror dimensions in goddamn trees anyways?

"Steve- Steve, I can't, I can't leave you!" Nancy hisses.

NANCY? Someone - no, Jonathan, Steve realizes belatedly, screams in the distance, frantic. Nancy looks around quickly, anxiety growing when she sees no sign of the teen in question. Steve's hands tighten around her shoulders.

"Nancy." he says urgently and she looks back at him, blinking tears. "Nancy, you *have to leave*. Get out of here. We're... I'm protecting Will, okay? Tell Jonathan. His mom's not crazy, and I'm keeping Will safe. Now get the hell out of here before that fucking thing hears us."

"I can't leave you!" Nancy protests again, shaking her head tearfully, and Steve bends down to kiss her as fiercely as he can. She melts into

it, gripping his shirt tightly in both hands, and after a moment, he rips away and shoves at her urgently.

“Go. Go, Nancy.” Steve hisses, and she takes a step back, hurt and torn. “I can’t keep you and Will both safe.” Steve whispers brokenly and she lifts a hand, stifling a sob.

She steps back again.

The ground crunches, the chomping stops, and the monster screeches.

“GO!” Steve roars, turning on his heel and charging.

“Come back here when you can! I’ll leave a weapon!” Nancy screams after him and he doesn’t look back, instead grabbing the attention of the monster as masterfully as he can.

He runs past it, punches it on the way by, and runs like *hell*.

The monster screams and gives chase.

Jonathan half-drags a hysterically sobbing Nancy out of a wet, rancid smelling hole in a tree. She twists the second she’s free, shoving her discarded baseball bat through the closing hole as hard as she can. Then she turns, gripping Jonathan with both hands, and sobs until she can’t breathe.

He holds her tightly, silently waiting even though she knows it must be agony for him, and when she finally pulls herself back together, the first thing she says is, “Will’s alive.”

Jonathan sags, the air leaving him in a rush, and his eyes redden with tears.

“Steve’s there, too. I saw him. He’s- He’s hurt. But he’s protecting Will.” Nancy says, catching another sob before blinking back more tears. “He’s keeping the monster away from Will. He said... he said your mom’s not crazy.”

Jonathan’s brow furrows, and then he looks utterly stricken. “The lights.” He breathes out. Nancy looks at him in confusion until he jerks to his feet, half-dragging her up with him. “Come on. We need to go to my place - Will’s talking to Mom.”

Nancy’s eyes widen. She sends one last, agonized look at the now solid tree, and lets Jonathan drag her away.

Two hours later, on the flip side of the world, Steve stops by the tree on his return to the Byers’ after losing the monster.

He picks up the baseball bat, grins, and spins it around as he heads back to the house.

Will? Joyce’s desperate voice greets Steve when he enters the house. He’s fucking *exhausted*, and though stopping to drink some water had helped, he still hasn’t eaten any food since getting into this hell dimension. The only bit of food the two had managed to scavenge had been straight up rotten. Not moldy, no. *Rotted*.

So, they hadn’t eaten. At all.

It sucks.

Steve? Nancy’s distant, distant voice breaks.

“Here.” Will steps back from the sofa and the lights above it. “Touch the lights. Talk to them.” He advises and Steve nods, frowning. He steps up onto the seat of the sofa, peering closely to see the letters painted under the fleshy vines.

I-M-H-E-R-E.

He’s here? Steve? Joyce asks and Steve smiles tiredly. *Steve?* Joyce asks in a different tone, addressing him now, and her voice breaks too. *Is my baby safe? Are you keeping him safe?*

S-A-F-E. Steve spells out. K-E-E-P-A-W-A-Y.

You keep the monster away? Jonathan’s voice cuts in and Steve twitches slightly. Five seconds at it and this already feels like a painfully slow way to communicate.

Y-E-S-S-A-F-E.

How bad are you hurt? I saw blood. Nancy chokes out and Steve grimaces, looking down at his leg.

It barely hurts at all now, but he’s pretty sure the ooze covering it is more black than red, which cannot *possibly* be a good sign. He reaches down and touches it, wincing at the heat of inflammation.

Definitely not a good sign.

I-N-F-E-C-T-E-D. He spells out, wincing at the wordless noise of pain Nancy makes at that. W-I-L-L-S-A-F-E, He adds firmly.

“But what about you?” Will murmurs and Steve looks at him sideways, smiling crookedly.

“I have you to keep me safe, don’t I? And my bat. Nancy gave it to me.” Steve says, presenting it proudly. It’s the only object in the entire god damned dimension that *isn’t* covered in alien flesh or slime.

“How’d she do that?” Will asks and Steve offers a one handed, vague shrug.

“No idea. There was a hole in a tree or something? She used it to come in and leave back for the real, not shitty world, and left this for me.”

“Wait. They had a way out?” Will asks, brow furrowing.

“Yeah. No idea how.”

Will steps up beside him on the sofa, frowning intently at the lights. After a moment, he reaches up.

T-R-E-E-H-O-L-E-O-P-E-N-H-O-W

There’s a moment of silence.

Tree hole open how? Joyce asks incredulously. *What- what does that even- even mean?*

There was a... deer. It had been hit by a car, was bleeding everywhere. The monster snatched it and dragged it through some... portal... in a tree. Jonathan explains, but Nancy’s oddly silent. *Nancy went through and came back out. She talked to Steve.*

Steve! Nancy suddenly yells, and Steve flinches as the sound actually manages to be loud in this dimension. He and Will exchange alarmed, nervous looks, and Steve tightens his grip on the bat. *Steve, were you hurt before you were grabbed? Were you bleeding?*

“What?” Steve mutters, then reaches up.

N-O.

Silence for a long moment.

What are you thinking? Jonathan asks and Nancy shushes him harshly.

More silence. Steve anxiously glances at the windows and doors, just in case the monster has backtracked too.

The knife thing Barb cut herself on. Were you near it, when it grabbed you? Near the blood? Nancy asks, and realization begins to dawn.

The blood. Jonathan realizes too.

Steve reaches up.

Y-E-S.

It makes sense, once he thinks about it. He hadn't been able to lose that goddamn monster until he'd stopped actively bleeding, and ever since he washed the blood off in the stream Will had showed him, it had been even easier to dodge it.

"If I go there will be trouble," Will sings quietly from where he lays on the sofa, clearly failing to sleep while Steve sits guard in front of him. *"If I stay there will be double..."*

"You know the YMCA song?" Steve asks suddenly.

Will's silent for a moment, then rolls over to face him. Steve tilts his head back so he can see the boy's face, arm tucked under his head as he looks at Steve, who leans back against the sofa. "Um. Yeah."

"Young man," Steve starts, bellowing it out cheerfully, and Will flinches a bit at the loud volume, eyes wide with alarm. *"There's no need to feel down. I said, young man! Pick yourself off the ground!"*

Will bites his lips, torn between fear and reluctant amusement at Steve's enthusiastic singing.

"Come on, let's serenade this monster. I said young man, cause you're in a new town, there's no need to be unhappy!"

Will giggles and joins in.

“ Young man, there's a place you can go

I said, young man, when you're short on your dough

You can stay there, and I'm sure you will find

Many ways to have a good time!”

Steve drums on his knees rhythmically.

“It's fun to stay at the YYYYYYYYY M C AAAAAA!” He bellows and Will laughs.

Steve grins unrepentantly.

It's totally worth it when he has to chase the monster off with his bat twenty minutes later.

The joy lasts approximately zero seconds, unfortunately. They hold the fort down at the house for another two days.

He's been in this dimension for eleven days now. Thirteen for Will.

Will's basically a skeleton, Steve's energy has flagged to actually painful levels, and the monster straight up leaps through the goddamn window to attack them. Steve snatches Will right off the sofa, using one arm to swing him behind him with a surprised squeal, and the other to swing his bat as hard as he can.

It catches the monster in the side of the head, Steve turns, and they fucking *bolt*. The monster's claws score down Steve's back, making him stagger unnoticed by Will, who takes the lead, but he quickly recovers and keeps running. He follows Will for maybe a mile before he remembers the glaring fucking problem.

He's bleeding.

Fuck. Steve glances frantically over his shoulder. The monster's still chasing, far enough behind to not be seen in more than flickers, and he looks at Will again. "Get hiding, Will. I'll find you."

"What? Where?" Will demands sharply. "Don't leave me!" He begs.

He's out of breath, his feet drag with every step, and Steve's terrifyingly aware that without him there to watch over the kid, Will was probably going to get snatched by the goddamn sentient vines from *hell*.

But he can't stay with the boy either, because the monster's tracking his blood. Steve *has* to leave Will to keep the monster away.

So he ignores Will's screaming pleas.

He ignores the fear that he's leaving Will to die to the vines instead of the monster.

He turns and he runs back towards the house.

The house is empty and he's temporarily lost the monster, but he knows it'll sniff him out soon, so he dives for the lights.

H-E-R-E, he lights up quickly, struggling to catch his breath.

Nancy! He hears Jonathan say sharply, and relief has him sagging a bit. God, his back *burns*.

Steve? Is that you? Nancy asks urgently and Steve reaches up, wincing at the sting and pull on his back.

Y-E-S. H-U-R-T. C-A-N-T-S-T-A-Y-L-O-N-G.

Hurt? How badly- Steve, Chief Hopper and Mrs. Byers are on the way to you. They know where the entrance to the Upside Down is. It's in Hawkins Laboratory! Nancy yells quickly, and he hears a small banging from the wall, like she's slapped it. *Can you get there? Can you and Will get to the entrance?*

Steve closes his eyes for a moment. The Laboratory is only two or three miles away, but he's so much more tired than he was just three hours ago that he's pretty sure he's losing too much damn blood.

He opens his eyes and reaches up.

N-O. S-E-P-E-R-A-T-E-D. D-R-E-W-A-W-A-Y.

Will isn't with you? Jonathan asks in sharp alarm.

M-O-N-S-T-E-R-F-O-U-N-D. W-I-L-L-W-E-A-K. I-R-A-N.

Shit. Shit! Jonathan says furiously. *Steve. Steve, please, you need to get him, get him to the Gate. They can get you out from there.*

Steve closes his eyes again, pressing his forehead to the fleshy wall, and takes deep breaths that make his lungs burn like acid. Every day, it's harder and harder to breathe.

N-O. He response, clear and concise.

No? Nancy echoes weakly. *Steve. Steve, please.* She says, voice rising in fear. *Please, Steve.* Nancy begs and Steve's eyes burn.

Something crunches outside.

Steve blinks back tears, tightens his hold on his bat, and reaches up with his free hand.

I-L-O-V-E-Y-O-U.

Steve? Nancy chokes out and Steve whips around, gripping the bat with both hands. The monster chitters and growls, circling the house. *Fuck. FUCK. Jonathan, now!* Nancy screams, and the monster leaps up onto the roof.

Steve tenses, crouching down and readying the bat.

The monster...

Disappears.

And then he hears the screaming.

Where is it?! Where is it?! Jonathan yells.

I don't know, I can't see it- There!

Gunshots.

He hears *gunshots*. Steve stares in utter confusion for a moment. What in the hell just happened?

Jonathan roars, Nancy screams, and the monster bellows in the distance, even though they must be standing in the same room.

"Nancy!" Steve shouts, but she can't hear him. They're running through the house, over to a bedroom, and everything goes silent.

The monster drops from the ceiling and lands almost on top of him, screeching right in his face.

"JESUS!" Steve shrieks, swinging wildly. The bat slams into the side of the monster's face and he pulls back for another swing, trapped between the back wall of the hallway and the goddamned monster. The monster's head snaps back up, face opening like the petals of a particularly toothy carnivorous flower, and Steve does something stupid.

Ridiculously stupid.

He rams the bat into its throat as hard as he fucking can.

It's stupid, but it *works*.

The monster staggers back, gagging and choking, but as it goes, it's petals close around the hand still holding the bat.

"FUCK!" Steve *screams* as he wrenches his hand free, making a mad dash as the monster scrambles to get the bat out of its mouth. "Fuck, fuck, fuck," Steve pants, running as fast as he can. He doesn't look at his hand - he's fucking terrified to, to be honest. It hurts like *hell* from the wrist to his fingertips, and blood is soaking his shirt as he cradles his hand to his chest.

He runs, even after the monster stops screaming and goes eerily silent again.

He runs, and crashes through the decaying undergrowth and almost tackles two people in hazmat suits.

"Jesus FUCKING CHRIST!" Steve yells at the top of his lungs, officially over all these god damn horror movie moments. "Fucking-Fuck this place, fuck these goddamn monsters, fuck this fucking blood, who the FUCK ARE YOU?"

For a moment, the hazmats stare at him.

"Chief Jim Hopper. This is Joyce Byers. We're looking for Will Byers, you're Steve Harrington?" He asks, and Steve slumps, anger rushing out of him.

"Fuck. Yes, I am un-fucking-fortunately Steve Harrington. I'd say it's a pleasure to meet you but it's really fucking shitty. Will's this way, the monster's back there, and I'm like five seconds from passing out, so we really need to keep moving unless you plan on leaving my ass in this- this whatever the *fuck* is covering goddamn EVERYTHING." Steve stomps the offensive fleshy, viney substance under foot, wincing at the pain in his probably now skin-less soles of his feet.

"Take me to him. Take me to my son, *please*," Joyce begs and Steve

shoots one last look towards the monster's direction before breaking into a run.

"He was headed this way. We split up, to get that monster away from him. Really likes him for some reason, really likes my blood more, though." Steve explains breathlessly, still cradling his probably mutilated hand to his chest. "Which means-" Steve glares up at the reddish-blue sky and scowls. "Which means you go that way, and I'll go that way." Steve points towards where he last saw Will, and then far off to the left.

"...You're kidding." The Chief says flatly.

"Hey, don't get me wrong, you bet your ass you're getting my sorry hide out of this shitty fucking hellhole." Steve says sharply, shaking his head. "But you need to find Will. Nance says the Gate or whatever is at Hawkin's Lab?"

"Yes, but-" Joyce says uncertainly.

"But nothing, I've spent a goddamn week keeping your kid alive, get him the hell out of here before it's too late. I'll meet you at the Gate." Steve says, and before the Chief can do more than make a quick grab for him, he's turning and bolting.

It takes him fifteen minutes to realize he hasn't heard the monster once, and he can't tell if that's a good thing or not. Steve slows to a stop, looking around warily, and struggles to catch his breath. Spots cover his vision, his lungs *burn* with every breath, and his cuts and slashes are starting to seriously fucking *hurt*.

Especially his damn ankle.

He stands there until the spots go away, then he straightens up and goes as quiet as he can, barely hearing his own breathing.

There's nothing.

Not a single hint of a rustle.

"...Shit," Steve breathes out, because the last thing they need right now is not know where the *fuck* the monster is.

He turns around and heads right back into town.

He finds the monster. The monster's found Hopper and Joyce. Hopper and Joyce have found Will.

And Will has found those freaky sentient vine things, because one's currently shoved down his throat.

The two hazmats are standing between the monster and the child, the Chief holding an automatic rifle of some sort, and the monster's back is firmly to Steve.

The Chief is shooting and it isn't slowing down the monster by very much, and just keeps advancing on the helpless woman and her son.

Steve never claimed to be particularly smart. He could claim to be *street smart*, though, which was what was important in the real world.

Except the thing is, he's in a mirror hell dimension with a carnivorous man eating faceless flower alien monster.

So, really, it's understandable that his street smarts were a bit skewed. Maybe even nonexistent, because he was tired as fuck, hungry as fuck, thirsty as fuck, and really fucking sick of this shit.

So the monster closes in on Hopper first, whose bullets begin to peter out, and Steve?

Steve...

Jumps on it's back.

It is not his brightest moment.

He leaps on the alien monster's back, shoving his fucked up arm under its faceless-face and against its throat. He wraps his legs around the monster's chest, reinforces his grip with his free hand, and pulls as hard as he fucking can.

The monster staggers, Hopper manages to not shoot Steve accidentally, and the monster staggers some more. It roars, reaching back awkwardly, and Steve weaves furiously around the flailing arms. He does a pretty good job of it while still choking the thing out, until it slams him backwards against the wall of the library.

The alien monster whips around, face opening in a furious scream, and raises its arm, so Steve raises his, too, trying to protect his face.

Hopper fires, the monster roar's its anger, and Steve lowers his arms to see the monster freeze halfway between him and Hopper. Hopper freezes too, out of sheer uncertainty as to what the monster was doing.

It was... sniffing.

Which is when it clicks like a light in Steve's mind.

The forest. It had had been chasing Steve and was sidetracked by the dying deer. The house, it had been advancing on him, ready to leap down at any moment, and then Nancy and Jonathan had done something and the monster vanished.

Steve's might've flunked calculus, but even he can figure out two plus two equals four.

So he jumps. "Oh no you don't!" Steve roars, tackling it's back again. It surprises it enough that it stumbles and Hopper jerks back, gun raises warily. "Fight me, you son of a bitch!" Steve clocks the monster as hard on the back of it's head as he can. It really fucking hurts, because he did it with his fucked up hand, like a *moron*.

He wrangles with the monster like a bull rider for several seconds before he realizes Hopper and Joyce *aren't moving*. "Dude! Take a hint!" Steve screams, voice rising at the last second, because the monster grabs his infected ankle. It hurts like a *bitch*, but being

thrown by it and hitting the ground hurts more.

“Harrington!” Hopper shouts, and Steve opens his mouth to snarl something, but the monster stops.

Sniffs.

Sinks into the ground like a puddle of tar.

Steve stares for a second, winded, and then hears Joyce scream. He scrambles to his aching feet, rushes to their side, and holds Joyce while Hopper administers CPR.

Later, he'll only vaguely remember the trip to Hawkin's Lab.

He's lost somewhere in a vague mixture of lingering shock from the whole alien and alien dimension thing, utter and unbelievable exhaustion and weakness from being dehydrated, starved, and sleep deprived, and, at last, an overwhelming sense of 'well now what' following the death of said alien.

It was hard to believe it was even gone after so long of tirelessly fleeing it's grip, of running for his life, and even by the time they make it to the lab and the giant, eerie ass portal thing, it still hadn't sunk in.

“That's creepy.” Steve says numbly, pointing a tired finger at the Gate.

“Yeah.” Hopper snorts, looking sideways at him. “You ready, kid?”

He feels weirdly lost for a second. Of course he's ready to be out of this hell, but...

How does he go *back*?

After *everything*?

But he's oozing blood, his ankle's miserably inflamed, and more importantly, Will hadn't even been *breathing* less than an hour ago.

So he grins at Hopper. "Scared, old man?" He asks lightly before walking backwards right through the fleshy gate.

The hospital is the worst part, Steve decides. Not because they even do anything uncomfortable. No, it's just that once he has a second to just *breathe*, he crashes like a meteor.

Will is safe and still breathing. Steve's safe and still breathing. Doctors surround them, someone lets him lay down on a hospital bed, and Steve's out like a fucking light.

He doesn't wake up for days, which is not actually a good thing. Fever and infection blaze through him. His lungs are damaged (temporarily, mostly, but some of it's permanent) so he stays on an oxygen mask for a week. The infection from his ankle is absolutely grotesque, and he later finds out that they almost amputated from the knee down.

But they survive, his leg survives, and when Steve wakes up four days after leaving that dimension, Nancy is staring at him with empty, red rimmed eyes, and Will is in a bed a few feet away with Jonathan and Joyce resting their upper bodies on either side of the kid, passed the fuck out.

"Nance." Steve croaks, and the girl jumps.

She stares at him, her hand spasming around his, and just *stares*.

He tries to smile. Her face crumples.

She's sobbing hysterically, but very quietly, against him seconds later. He uses his hand (which is completely covered in bandages, from mid-forearm to each fingertip) to brush back her hair, the best he can do. He's uncoordinated and sluggish, and he can't really feel his hand at all as he runs it over her head.

Nancy snuffles into his chest and trembles like a leaf in the wind for so long that he almost falls back asleep when she lifts her head, holding his hand even tighter. "I was so scared." She says brokenly, and he snorts, lips splitting into a wryly amused grin under the oxygen mask.

"Not as scared... as I was."

Luckily, she takes it as the joke (albeit dark) that he intended, a wet laugh escaping her.

She spends the rest of the night's hours explaining everything that happened from their side of the universe.

Which is how he learns about government conspiracies, psychic twelve year olds, Demogorgons, the Upside Down, and Hawkin's most dangerous secrets.

And that, apparently, he was a community superhero.

"You're joking." He rasps out, still raw from the toxic air, and Nancy offers a damp smile.

"Nope. Hopper came up with the story himself. He was... impressed, when Will said all you'd done for him. You... went above and beyond to keep him safe." Nancy says, voice catching, and he squeezes her hand weakly. "He wanted to make sure people knew what you did for him. So you two got trapped by a wild animal." Nancy smiles weakly. "We just left out the part about it being a literal monster that trapped you."

Steve contemplates that for a long minute, his mind sluggishly

turning that idea over and over again in his mind. “My injuries?”

“Protecting Will from the monster, ah, bear. Just like how you *did* get them.” Nancy promises, her voice softening. She reaches up to stroke his cheek, looking impossibly gentle, and he’s never loved anyone more than he loves her in that moment.

“I’m sorry, Nance.” He whispers and she stills, confusion making its way onto her face. “I didn’t... treat you well enough.”

“What do you mean? You’ve always treated me well, idiot.” She says fondly and Steve grimaces softly.

“I was cruel. I was mocking and mean. I... Barbara’s safe?” He asks suddenly, brow furrowing, and Nancy nods.

“Yes. And she knows everything. She helped Jonathan and I search for you two.”

“Good.” Steve closes his eyes for a moment, taking a breath. “Good.”

“Get back to sleep, Steve.” Nancy says gently. “You need it.” She runs her hand through his hair, which has been meticulously cleaned during his unconsciousness, and he sinks against her touch. “Sleep. We’ll talk in the morning.”

“Love you, Nance.” He says quietly, muffled further by the oxygen mask.

Her fingers still for a split second, then return even more fiercely. “I love you too, Steve.” She swears, and he smiles weakly before giving into unconsciousness.

He’s safe, and he kept Will alive against all odds.

Yeah.

Steve Harrington might be an idiot, but it turns out he’s a pretty damn good babysitter.

He lets out a slow, easy breath, and feels more relaxed and at ease than he has in nearly two weeks.

They're alive, and they're safe.

Yeah.

He's a *damn good* babysitter.

Author's Note:

Hope you enjoyed ♥